

# Introduction

**I**N the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* Rousseau summons men to hear for the first time the true history of their species.<sup>1</sup> Man was born free, equal, self-sufficient, unprejudiced, and whole; now, at the end of history, he is in chains (ruled by other men or by laws he did not make), defined by relations of inequality (rich or poor, noble or commoner, master or slave), dependent, full of false opinions or superstitions, and divided between his inclinations and his duties. Nature made man a brute, but happy and good. History—and man is the only animal with a history—by the development of his faculties and the progress of his mind has made man civilized, but unhappy and immoral. History is not a theodicy but a tale of misery and corruption.

*Emile*, on the other hand, has a happy ending, and Rousseau says he cares little if men take it to be only a novel, for it ought, he says, to be the history of his species.<sup>2</sup> And therewith he provides the key to *Emile*. It is, as Kant says,<sup>3</sup> the work which attempts to reconcile nature with history, man's selfish nature with the demands of civil society, hence, inclination with duty. Man requires a healing education which returns him to himself. Rousseau's paradoxes—his attack on the arts and the sciences while he practices them, his praise of the savage and natural freedom over against his advocacy of the ancient city, the general will, and virtue, his perplexing presentations of himself as citizen, lover, and solitary—are not expressions of a troubled soul but accurate reflections of an incoherence in the structure of the world we all face, or rather, in general, do not face; and *Emile* is an experiment in restoring harmony to that world by reordering the emergence of man's acquisitions in such a way as to avoid the imbalances created by them while allowing the full actualization of man's potential. Rousseau believed that his was a privileged moment, a moment when all of man's faculties had revealed themselves and when man had, furthermore, attained for the first time knowledge of the principles of human nature. *Emile* is the canvas on which Rousseau tried to paint all of the soul's acquired passions and learning in such a way as to cohere with man's natural wholeness. It is a *Phenomenology of the Mind* posing as Dr. Spock.

Thus *Emile* is one of those rare total or synoptic books, a book with which one can live and which becomes deeper as one becomes deeper,

1. In *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1969, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), vol. 3, p. 133; *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), pp. 103-104.

2. P. 416 below.

3. "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," in *On History*, ed. Lewis Beck (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), pp. 60-61.



a book comparable to Plato's *Republic*, which it is meant to rival or supersede.<sup>4</sup> But it is not recognized as such in spite of Rousseau's own judgment that it was his best book and Kant's view that its publication was an event comparable to the French Revolution. Of Rousseau's major works it is the one least studied or commented on. It is as though the book's force had been entirely spent on impact with men like Kant and Schiller, leaving only the somewhat cranky residue for which the book retains its fame in teacher training schools: the harangues against swaddling and in favor of breast feeding and the learning of a trade. Whatever the reasons for its loss of favor (and this would make an interesting study) *Emile* is a truly great book, one that lays out for the first time and with the greatest clarity and vitality the modern way of posing the problems of psychology.

By this I mean that Rousseau is at the source of the tradition which replaces virtue and vice as the causes of a man's being good or bad, happy or miserable, with such pairs of opposites as sincere/insincere, authentic/inauthentic, inner-directed/other-directed, real self/alienated self. All these have their source in Rousseau's analysis of *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*, a division within man's soul resulting from man's bodily and spiritual dependence on other men which ruptures his original unity or wholeness. The distinction between *amour de soi* and *amour-propre* is meant to provide the true explanation for that tension within man which had in the past been understood to be a result of the opposed and irreconcilable demands of the body and the soul. *Emile* gives the comprehensive account of the genesis of *amour-propre*, displays its rich and multifarious aspects (spreads the peacock's tail, as it were), and maps man's road back to himself from his spiritual exile (his history) during which he wandered through nature and society, a return to himself which incorporates into his substance all the cumbersome treasures he gathered en route. This analysis supersedes that based on the distinction between body and soul, which in its turn had activated the quest for virtue, seen as the taming and controlling of the body's desires under the guidance of the soul's reason. It initiates the great longing to be one's self and the hatred of alienation which characterizes all modern thought. The wholeness, unity, or singleness of man—a project ironically outlined in the *Republic*—is the serious intention of *Emile* and almost all that came afterward.

*Emile* is written to defend man against a great threat which bids fair to cause a permanent debasement of the species, namely, the almost inevitable universal dominance of a certain low human type which Rousseau was the first to isolate and name: the *bourgeois*. Rousseau's enemy was not the ancien régime, its throne, its altar, or its nobility. He was certain that all these were finished, that revolution would shortly sweep them away to make room for a new world based on the egalitarian principles of the new philosophy. The real struggle would then concern the kind of man who was going to inhabit that world, for the striking element of the situation was and is that a true theoretical

4. P. 40 below.



## INTRODUCTION

insight seems to have given rise to a low human consequence. What I mean by this is that the bourgeois, that debased form of the species, is the incarnation of the political science of Hobbes and Locke, the first principles of which Rousseau accepted. We can see this with particular clarity in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, the scheme of which is adopted from Rousseau. Equality, Tocqueville tells us, is now almost a providential fact; no one believes any longer in the justice of the principles on which the old distinctions between ranks or classes were made and which were the basis of the old regime. The only question remaining is whether freedom can accompany equality or universal tyranny will result from it. It is to the formation of free men and free communities founded on egalitarian principles to which both Rousseau and Tocqueville are dedicated.

Now, who, according to Rousseau, is the bourgeois? Most simply, following Hegel's formula, he is the man motivated by fear of violent death, the man whose primary concern is self-preservation or, according to Locke's correction of Hobbes, comfortable self-preservation. Or, to describe the inner workings of his soul, he is the man who, when dealing with others, thinks only of himself, and on the other hand, in his understanding of himself, thinks only of others. He is a role-player. The bourgeois is contrasted by Rousseau, on the one side, with the natural man, who is whole and simply concerned with himself, and on the other, with the citizen, whose very being consists in his relation to his city, who understands his good to be identical with the common good. The bourgeois distinguishes his own good from the common good. His good requires society, and hence he exploits others while depending on them. He must define himself in relation to them. The bourgeois comes into being when men no longer believe that there is a common good, when the notion of the fatherland decays. Rousseau hints that he follows Machiavelli in attributing this decay to Christianity, which promised the heavenly fatherland and thereby took away the supports from the earthly fatherland, leaving social men who have no reason to sacrifice private desire to public duty.

What Christianity revealed, modern philosophy gave an account of: man is not naturally a political being; he has no inclination toward justice. By nature he cares only for his own preservation, and all of his faculties are directed to that end. Men are naturally free and equal in the decisive respects: they have no known authority over them, and they all pursue the same independent end. Men have a natural right to do what conduces to their preservation. All of this Rousseau holds to be true. He differs only in that he does not believe that the duty to obey the laws of civil society can be derived from self-interest. Hobbes and Locke burdened self-interest with more than it can bear; in every decisive instance the sacrifice of the public to the private follows from nature. They produced hypocrites who make promises they cannot intend to keep and who feign concern for others out of concern for themselves, thus using others as means to their ends and alienating themselves. Civil society becomes merely the combat zone for the pursuit of power—control over things and especially over men. With enlightenment the illusions are dispelled, and men learn that they care

about their own lives more than about country, family, friendship, or honor. Fanaticism, although dangerous and distorting, could at least produce selfless and extraordinary deeds. But now fanaticism gives way to calculation. And pride, although it is the spur to domination, is also allied with that noble indifference to life which seems to be a precondition of freedom and the resistance to tyranny. But quenched by fear, pride gives way to vanity, the concern for petty advantages over others. This diminution of man is the apparent result of his enlightenment about his true nature.

In response to this challenge of the new philosophy Rousseau undertakes to rethink man's nature in its relation to the need for society engendered by history. What he attempts is to present an egalitarian politics that rivals Plato's politics in moral appeal rather than an egalitarian politics that debases man for the sake of the will-of-the-wisp, security. In imagination he takes an ordinary boy and experiments with the possibility of making him into an autonomous man—morally and intellectually independent, as was Plato's philosopher-king, an admittedly rare, and hence aristocratic, human type. The success of such a venture would prove the inherent dignity of man as man, each and every ordinary man, and thus it would provide a high-level ground for the choice of democracy. Since Rousseau, overcoming of the bourgeois has been regarded as almost identical with the problem of the realization of true democracy and the achievement of "genuine personality."

The foregoing reflections give a clue to the literary character of *Emile*. The two great moral-political traditions that were ultimately displaced by the modern natural right teachings—that is, the Biblical and the classical—were accompanied by great works of what may be called poetry. This poetry depicts great human types who embody visions of the right way of life, who make that way of life plausible, who excite admiration and emulation. The Bible, on the highest level, gives us prophets and saints; and in the realm of ordinary possibility it gives us the pious man. Homer and Plutarch give us, at the peak, heroes; and, for everyday fare, gentlemen. Modern philosophy, on the other hand, could not inspire a great poetry corresponding to itself. The exemplary man whom it produces is too contemptible for the noble Muse; he can never be a model for those who love the beautiful. The fact that he cannot is symptomatic of how the prosaic new philosophy truncates the human possibility. With *Emile* Rousseau confronts this challenge and dares to enter into competition with the greatest of the old poets. He sets out to create a human type whose charms can rival those of the saint or the tragic hero—the natural man—and thereby shows that his thought too can comprehend the beautiful in man.

*Emile* consists of a series of stories, and its teaching comes to light only when one has grasped each of these stories in its complex detail and artistic unity. Interpretation of this "novel," the first *Bildungsroman*, requires a union of *l'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*, a union which it both typifies and teaches. It is impossible here to do more than indicate the plan of the work and tentatively describe its general

# INTRODUCTION

intention in the hope of indicating the nature of this work whose study is so imperative for an understanding of the human possibility.

## I

*Emile* is divided into two large segments. Books I-III are devoted to the rearing of a civilized savage, a man who cares only about himself, who is independent and self-sufficient and on whom no duties that run counter to his inclinations and so divide him are imposed, whose knowledge of the crafts and the sciences does not involve his incorporation into the system of public opinion and division of labor. Books IV-V attempt to bring this atomic individual into human society and into a condition of moral responsibility on the basis of his inclinations and his generosity.

Rousseau's intention in the first segment comes most clearly to light in its culmination, when Jean-Jacques, the tutor, gives his pupil the first and only book he is to read prior to early adulthood. Before presenting his gift, Jean-Jacques expresses to the reader the general sentiment that he hates all books—including, implicitly but especially, the book of books, the guide of belief and conduct, the Bible. Books act as intermediaries between men and things; they attach men to the opinions of others rather than forcing them to understand on their own or leaving them in ignorance. They excite the imagination, increasing thereby the desires, the hopes, and the fears beyond the realm of the necessary. All of *Emile's* early rearing is an elaborate attempt to avoid the emergence of the imagination which, according to the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, is the faculty that turns man's intellectual progress into the source of his misery. But, in spite of this general injunction against books and in direct contradiction of what he has just said, Rousseau does introduce a book, one which presents a new teaching and a new *mode* of teaching. The book is *Robinson Crusoe*, and it is not meant to be merely a harmless amusement for *Emile* but to provide him with a vision of the whole and a standard for the judgment of both things and men.<sup>5</sup>

*Robinson Crusoe* is a solitary man in the state of nature, outside of civil society and unaffected by the deeds or opinions of men. His sole concern is his preservation and comfort. All his strength and reason are dedicated to these ends, and utility is his guiding principle, the principle that organizes all his knowledge. The world he sees contains neither gods nor heroes; there are no conventions. Neither the memory of Eden nor the hope of salvation affects his judgment. Nature and natural needs are all that is of concern to him. *Robinson Crusoe* is a kind of Bible of the new science of nature and reveals man's true original condition.

5. Pp. 184 ff. below.



This novel, moreover, provides a new kind of play for the first activity of the imagination. In the first place, the boy does not imagine beings or places which do not exist. He imagines himself in situations and subject to necessities which are part of his experience. Actually his imagination divests itself of the imaginary beings that seem so real in ordinary society and are of human making. He sees himself outside of the differences of nation and religion which cover over nature and are the themes of ordinary poetry. Second, he does not meet with heroes to whom he must subject himself or whom he is tempted to rival. Every man can be Crusoe and actually is Crusoe to the extent that he tries to be simply man. Crusoe's example does not alienate Emile from himself as do the other fictions of poetry; it helps him to be himself. He understands his hero's motives perfectly and does not ape deeds the reasons for which he cannot imagine.

A boy, who imagining himself alone on an island uses all of his energy in thinking about what he needs to survive and how to procure it, will have a reason for all his learning; its relevance to what counts is assured; and the fear, reward, or vanity that motivate ordinary education are not needed. Nothing will be accepted on authority; the evidence of his senses and the call of his desires will be his authorities. Emile, lost in the woods and hungry, finds his way home to lunch by his knowledge of astronomy. For him astronomy is not a discipline forced on him by his teachers, or made attractive by the opportunity to show off, or an expression of his superstition. In this way Rousseau shows how the sciences, which have served historically to make men more dependent on one another, can serve men's independence. In this way the Emile who moves in civil society will put different values on things and activities than do other men. The division of labor which produces superfluity and makes men partial—pieces of a great machine—will seem like a prison, and an unnecessary prison, to him. He will treasure his wholeness. He will know real value, which is the inverse of the value given things by the vanity of social men. And he will respect the producers of real value and despise the producers of value founded on vanity. Nature will be always present to him, not as doctrine but as a part of his very senses. Thus *Robinson Crusoe*, properly prepared for and used, teaches him the utility of the sciences and makes him inwardly free in spite of society's constraints.

Here then we have Rousseau's response to Plato. Plato said that all men always begin by being prisoners in the cave. The cave is civil society considered in its effect on the mind of those who belong to it. Their needs, fears, hopes, and indignations produce a network of opinions and myths which make communal life possible and give it meaning. Men never experience nature directly but always mix their beliefs into what they see. Liberation from the cave requires the discovery of nature under the many layers of convention, the separating out of what is natural from what is man-made. Only a genius is capable of attaining a standpoint from which he can see the cave as a cave. That is why the philosopher, the rarest human type, can alone be autonomous and free of prejudice. Now, Rousseau agrees that once in the cave, genius is required to emerge from it. He also agrees that enlightenment is spurious and merely the

## INTRODUCTION

substitution of one prejudice for another. He himself was born in a cave and had to be a genius to attain his insight into the human condition. His life is a testimony to the heroic character of the quest for nature. But he denies that the cave is natural. The right kind of education, one independent of society, can put a child into direct contact with nature without the intermixture of opinion. Plato purified poetry so as to make its view of the world less hostile to reason, and he replaced the ordinary lies by a noble lie. Rousseau banishes poetry altogether and suppresses all lies. At most he gives Emile Robinson Crusoe, who is not an "other" but only himself. Above all, no gods. At the age of fifteen, Emile has a standpoint outside of civil society, one fixed by his inclinations and his reason, from which he sees that his fellow men are prisoners in a cave and by which he is freed from any temptation to fear the punishments or seek the honors which are part of it. Rousseau, the genius, has made it possible for ordinary men to be free, and in this way he proves in principle the justice of democracy.

Thus Rousseau's education of the young Emile confines itself to fostering the development of the faculties immediately connected with his preservation. His desire for the pleasant and avoidance of the painful are given by nature. His senses are the natural means to those ends. And the physical sciences, like mathematics, physics, and astronomy, are human contrivances which, if solidly grounded on the pure experience of the senses, extend the range of the senses and protect them from the errors of imagination. The tutor's responsibility is, in the first place, to let the senses develop in relation to their proper objects; and, secondly, to encourage the learning of the sciences as the almost natural outcome of the use of the senses. Rousseau calls this tutelage, particularly with reference to the part that has to do with the senses, negative education. All animals go through a similar apprenticeship to life. But with man something intervenes that impedes or distorts nature's progress, and therefore a specifically negative education, a human effort, is required. This new factor is the growth of the passions, particularly fear of death and *amour-propre*. Fed by imagination and intermingling with the desires and the senses, they transform judgment and lead to a special kind of merely human, or mythical, interpretation of the world. Negative education means specifically the tutor's artifices invented for the purpose of preventing the emergence of these two passions which attach men to one another and to opinions.

With respect to fear of death, Rousseau flatly denies that man does naturally fear death, and hence denies the premise of Hobbes's political philosophy (as well as what appears to be the common opinion of all political thinkers). Now Rousseau does not disagree with the modern natural right thinkers that man's only natural vocation is self-preservation or that man seeks to avoid pain, but Rousseau insists that man is not at first aware of the meaning of death, nor does man change his beliefs or ways of life to avoid it. He argues that death, as Hobbes's man sees it, is really a product of the imagination; and only on the basis of that imagination will he give up his natural idle and pleasure-loving life in order to pursue power after power so as to forestall death's assaults. The conception that life can be extinguished turns life, which



is the condition of living, into an end in itself. No animal is capable of such a conception, and, therefore, no animal thus transforms his life. Rousseau suggests that a man can be kept at the animal's unconscious level in regard to death long enough for him to have established a fixed and unchanging positive way of life, a way of life in which he will be accustomed to pain as well as knowledgeable enough not to be overwhelmed by the fact of death when he becomes fully aware of it. Ordinarily fear of death leads to one of two possible responses: superstition or the attempt to conquer the inevitability of dying. The first gives hope that gods will protect one in this life or provide one with another life. The second response, that of the Enlightenment, uses science to prolong life and establish solid political regimes, putting off the inevitable and absorbing men in the holding action. Neither faces the fact of death, and both pervert consciousness.

This leads us to what Socrates meant by the dictum that philosophy is "learning how to die." All men die, and many die boldly or resolutely; but practically none does so, however, without illusion. Such illusion constitutes the horizon of the cave whose conventions are designed to support human hopes and fears. Thus to know how to die is equivalent to being liberated from the cave. And Rousseau, who argues that there is no natural cave, therefore also concludes that men naturally know how to die. "Priests, doctors and philosophers unlearn us how to die."<sup>6</sup> He does not suggest that every savage or every baby has meditated on death as did Socrates. He means that, naturally, every man is without the illusions about death that pervert life and require the Socratic effort. The tutor's function is to forestall the ministrations of priests, doctors, and philosophers which engender and nourish the fear of death. The simple lesson is that man must rely on himself and recognize and accept necessity; Rousseau shows how this can be achieved without requiring the exercise of the rarest virtues.

Although fear of death makes it difficult to accept necessity, *amour-propre* is what makes it difficult to recognize necessity. This is the murky passion that accounts for the "interesting" relationships men have with one another, and it is the keystone of Rousseau's psychological teaching. The primary intention of the negative education is to prevent *amour de soi* from turning into *amour-propre*, for this is the true source of man's dividedness. Rousseau's treatment of this all-important theme is best introduced by his discussion of the meaning of a baby's tears.<sup>7</sup>

Tears, he tells us, are a baby's language and naturally express physical discomfort and are pleas for help. The parent or nurse responds by satisfying a real need, feeding the baby, for example, or removing the source of pain. But at some point the child is likely to recognize that his tears have the effect of making things serve him through the intermediary of adults. The world responds to his wishes. His will can make things move to satisfy his desires. At this point the baby loses interest in providing himself with things; his inner motive to become strong enough to get for himself the things that others now provide for him is transformed into a desire to control the instrument which provides

6. P. 35 below.

7. Pp. 64-69 below.



## INTRODUCTION

him with those things. His concern with his physical needs is transformed into a passion to control the will of adults. His tears become commands and frequently no longer are related to his real needs but only to testing his power. He cannot stop it from raining by crying, but he can make an adult change his mind. He becomes aware of will; and he knows that wills, as opposed to necessity, are subject to command, that they are changing. He quickly learns that, for his life, control over men is more useful than adaptation to things. Therefore the disposition of adults towards him replaces his bodily needs as his primary concern. Every wish that is not fulfilled could, in his imagination, be fulfilled if the adult only willed it that way. His experience of his own will teaches him that others' wills are selfish and plastic. He therefore seeks for power over men rather than for the use of things. He becomes a skillful psychologist, able to manipulate others.

With the possibility of change of wills emerges the justification for blame and hence for anger. Nature does not have intentions; men do. Anger is caused by intentional wrong, and the child learns to see intention to do wrong in that which opposes him. He becomes an avenger. A squalling brat is most often testing his power. If he gets what he wants, he is a master. If he fails, he is angry, resentful, and likely to become slavish. In either event he has entered into a dialectic of mastery and slavery which will occupy him for his whole life. His natural and healthy self-love and self-esteem (*amour de soi*) gives way to a self-love relative to other men's opinions of him; henceforth he can esteem himself only if others esteem him. Ultimately he makes the impossible demand that others care for him more than they care for themselves. The most interesting of psychological phenomena is this doubling or dividing of self-love; it is one of the few distinctively human phenomena (no animal can be insulted); and from it flow anger, pride, vanity, resentment, revenge, jealousy, indignation, competition, slavishness, humility, capriciousness, rebelliousness, and almost all the other passions that give poets their themes. In these first seeds of *amour-propre* as seen in tears, one can recognize the source of the human problem.

Rousseau's solution to *amour-propre*, which would seem inevitably to lead to conflict among men—their using one another as means to their own ends and the need for government and law—is, as with the fear of death, to prevent its emergence at least for a long time. No self-overcomings are required. The child must be dependent on things and not on wills. The tutor and his helpers must disappear, as it were, and everything that happens to the child must seem to be an inevitable effect of nature. Against necessity he will not rebel; it is only the possibility of overcoming necessity or the notion that there is a will lurking behind it which disturbs his unclouded relation to things as they are. It is the mediation of human beings in the satisfaction of need that causes the problem.

Now all of this has even more significance than is immediately apparent, for Rousseau suggests that superstition, all attribution of intention to inanimate things or to the world as a whole, is a result of the early experience of will. In moving things at the child's command

the parent gives the child the impression that all things are moved by intention and that command or prayer can put them at man's disposal. Moreover, anger itself animates. The child who is angry at what does not bend to his will attributes a will to it. This is the case with all anger, as a moment's reflection will show. Anger is allied with and has its origin in *amour-propre*. Once it is activated, it finds intention and responsibility everywhere. Finally it animates rivers, storms, the heavens, and all sorts of benevolent and malevolent beings. It moralizes the universe in the service of *amour-propre*.

In early childhood, there is a choice: the child can see everything or nothing as possessing a will like his own. Either whim or necessity governs the world for him. Neither case is true, but for the child the notion that necessity governs his world is the more salutary because nature is necessity and the primary things are necessary. The passions must submit to necessity, whereas necessity cannot be changed by the passions.<sup>8</sup> Before he comes to terms with will, a man must have understood and accepted necessity. Otherwise he is likely to spend his life obeying and fearing gods or trying to become one. Unlike more recent proponents of freedom, Rousseau recognized that without necessity the realm of freedom can have no meaning.

Rousseau's teaching about *amour-propre* goes to the heart of his disagreement with Plato. Plato had argued that something akin to what Rousseau calls *amour-propre* is an independent part of the soul. This is *thymos*, spiritedness, or simply anger. It is the motive of his warriors in the *Republic* and is best embodied in Achilles, who is almost entirely *thymos*. Plato was aware of all the dangers of *thymos*, but he insisted that it must be given its due because it is part of human nature, because it can be the instrument for restraining desire, and because it is connected with a noble and useful human type. Simply, it is *thymos* that makes men overcome their natural fear of death. Rather than excise it, Plato sought to tame this lion in the soul. The education in Books II-III of the *Republic* suggests the means to make it gentle and submissive to reason. However, these warriors do require myths and noble lies. They are cave dwellers. Man naturally animates the universe and tries to make it responsive to his demands and blames it for resisting. Plato focuses on Achilles, who struggles with a river that he takes to be a god, just as Rousseau is fascinated by the madness of Xerxes, who beats a recalcitrant sea.<sup>9</sup> These are the extreme but most revealing instances of the passion to rule. The difference between Plato and Rousseau on this crucial point comes down to whether anger is natural or derivative. Rousseau says that a child who is not corrupted and wants a cookie will never rebel against the phrase, "There are no more," but only against, "You cannot have one." Plato insists that this is not so. Men naturally see intention where there is none and must become wise in order to separate will from necessity in nature. They do, however, both agree that *thymos* is an important part of the spiritual economy, and that, once present, it must be treated with the greatest respect. Herein they differ from Hobbes, who simply doused this great

8. P. 219 below.

9. Plato *Republic* 391a-b; pp. 87-88, 213-214 below.



## INTRODUCTION

cause of war with buckets of fear, in the process extinguishing the soul's fire. Rousseau gives a complete account of pride and its uses and abuses, whereas other modern psychologists have either lost sight of it or tried to explain it away. Our education does not take it seriously, and we risk producing timid souls or ones whose untrained spiritedness is wildly erratic and seeks dangerous outlets.

Given that the child must never confront other wills, Jean-Jacques tells us that he cannot be given commandments. He would not understand even the most reasonable restriction on his will as anything other than the expression of the selfishness of the one giving the commandments. The child must always do what he wants to do. This, we recognize, is the dictum of modern-day progressive education, and Rousseau is rightly seen as its source. What is forgotten is that Rousseau's full formula is that while the child must always do what he wants to do, he should want to do only what the tutor wants him to do.<sup>10</sup> Since an uncorrupt will does not rebel against necessity, and the tutor can manipulate the appearance of necessity, he can determine the will without sowing the seeds of resentment. He presents natural necessity in palpable form to the child so that the child lives according to nature prior to understanding it.

Rousseau demonstrates this method in a story that shows how he improves on earlier moral teachings.<sup>11</sup> He puts his Emile in a garden where there are no *nos*, no forbidden fruit, and no Fall, and tries to show that in the end his pupil will be healthy, whole, and of a purer morality than the old Adam. He gets Emile to respect the fruit of another without tempting him.

The boy is induced to plant some beans as a kind of game. His curiosity, imitativeness, and childish energy are used to put him to the task. He watches the beans grow while Jean-Jacques orates to him, supporting him in the pleasure he feels at seeing the result of his work and encouraging him in the sense that the beans are his by supplying a proper rationale for that sense. The speech does not bore him as a sermon would because it supports his inclination instead of opposing it. Jean-Jacques gives him what is in essence Locke's teaching on property. The beans belong to Emile because he has mixed his labor with them. Jean-Jacques begins by teaching him his right to his beans rather than by commanding him to respect the fruits of others.

Once the child has a clear notion of what belongs to him, he is given his first experience of injustice. One day he finds that his beans have been plowed under. And therewith he also has his first experience of anger, in the form of righteous indignation. He seeks the guilty party with the intention of punishing him. His selfish concern is identical with his concern for justice. But much to his surprise, Emile finds that the criminal considers himself to be the injured party and is equally angry with him. It is the gardener, and he had planted seeds for melons—melons that were to be eaten by Emile—and Emile had plowed under those seeds to plant his beans. Here we have will against will, anger against anger. Although Emile's wrath loses some of its force—in-

10. P. 120 below.

11. Pp. 97-100 below.

much as the gardener has an even better claim to have right on his side (he was the first occupant), and this according to the very notion of right which Emile uses and which he so eagerly imbibed from Jean-Jacques—the situation could lead to war. But Jean-Jacques avoids that outcome by means of two stratagems. First, Emile's attention is diverted from his beans by the thought of the rare melons he would have enjoyed. Second, a kind of social contract is arranged: in the future Emile will stay away from the gardener's lands if he is granted a small plot for his beans. In this way the boy is brought to understand and respect the property of others without losing anything of his own. If there were a conflict of interest, Emile would naturally prefer his own. But Jean-Jacques does not put him in that position. If Emile were commanded to keep away from what he desires, the one who commanded him to do so would be responsible for setting him against himself and encouraging him to deceive. A luscious fruit in the garden which was forbidden would only set the selfish will of the owner against Emile's nature. Jean-Jacques at least gives Emile grounds for respecting property and brings him as close to an obligation as can be grounded on mere nature. Greater demands at this stage would be both ineffective and corrupting. The tempter is the giver of commandments. Rousseau here follows Hobbes in deriving duties, or approximations to them, from rights. In this way Emile will rarely infringe the rights of others, and he will have no intention to harm them.

It is this latter that constitutes the morality of the natural man and also that of the wise man (according to Rousseau).<sup>12</sup> It takes the place of the Christian's Golden Rule. When Rousseau says that man is by nature good, he means that man, concerned only with his own well-being, does not naturally have to compete with other men (scarcity is primarily a result of extended desire), nor does he care for their opinions (and, hence, he does not need to try to force them to respect him). Man's goodness is identical to his natural freedom (of body and soul) and equality. And here he agrees, contrary to the conventional wisdom, with Machiavelli, who said men are all bad. For Machiavelli meant that men are bad when judged from the standpoint of the common good, or of how men ought to live, or of the imaginary cities of the old writers. These make demands on men contrary to their natural inclinations and are therefore both unfounded and ineffective. If these standards are removed and men's inclinations are accepted rather than blamed, it turns out that with the cooperation of these inclinations sound regimes can be attained. From the standpoint of imaginary perfection man's passions are bad; from that of the natural desire for self-preservation they are good. Machiavelli preaches the adoption of the latter standpoint and the abandonment of all transcendence and with it the traditional dualism. And it is this project of reconciliation with what is that Rousseau completes in justifying the wholeness of self-concern, in proving that the principles of the old morality are not only ineffective but the cause of corruption (since they cause men to deny themselves and thus to become hypocrites), and in learning how

12. Pp. 104–105 below; *Plato Republic* 335 a–e.



## INTRODUCTION

to control that imagination which gives birth to the imaginary cities (which, in their opposition to the real cities, are the signs of man's dividedness).

The moral education of the young Emile is, then, limited to the effective establishment of the rule that he should harm no one. And this moral rule cooperates with the intellectual rule that he should know how to be ignorant. This latter means that only clear and distinct evidence should ever command belief. Neither passions nor dependencies should make him need to believe. All his knowledge should be relevant to his real needs, which are small and easily satisfied. In a sense, Rousseau makes his young Emile an embodiment of the Enlightenment's new scientific method. His will to affirm never exceeds his capacity to prove. For others that method is only a tool, liable to the abuses of the passions and counterpoised by many powerful needs. All this is described in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. But to Emile, whose only desire is to know and live according to the necessary, the new science of the laws of nature is a perfect complement. With a solid floor constituted by healthy senses in which he trusts and a ceiling provided by astronomy, Emile is now prepared to admit his fellows into a structure which their tempestuous passions cannot shake. This fifteen-year-old, who has not unlearned how to die, harms no one, and knows how to be ignorant, possesses a large share of the Socratic wisdom.

## II

Emile at fifteen cares no more for his father than his dog. A child who did would be motivated by fear or desire for gain induced by dependency. Rousseau has made Emile free of those passions by keeping him self-sufficient, and he has thus undermined the economic foundations of civil society laid by Hobbes and Locke. Since Rousseau agrees with the latter that man has no natural inclination to civil society and the fulfillment of obligation, he must find some other selfish natural passion that can somehow be used as the basis for a genuine—as opposed to a spurious, competitive—concern for others. Such a passion is necessary in order to provide the link between the individual and disinterested respect for law or the rights of others, which is what is meant by real morality.

Rousseau finds such a solution in the sexual passion. It necessarily involves other individuals and results in relations very different from those following from fear or love of gain. Moreover, Rousseau discovers that sexual desire, if its development is properly managed, has singular effects on the soul. Books IV–V are a treatise on sex education, notwithstanding the fact that they give a coherent account of God, love, and politics. "Civilization" can become "culture" when it is motivated and organized by sublimated sex.

Sublimation as the source of the soul's higher expressions—as the

explanation of that uniquely human turning away from mere bodily gratification to the pursuit of noble deeds, arts, and thoughts—was introduced to the world by Rousseau. The history of the notion can be traced from him through Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche (who first introduced the actual term) and to Freud (who popularized it). Rousseau's attempt to comprehend the richness of man's soul within the context of modern scientific reductionism led him to an interpretation which is still our way of looking at things although we have lost clarity about its intention and meaning. Rousseau knew that there are sublime things; he had inner experience of them. He also knew that there is no place for the sublime in the modern scientific explanation of man. Therefore, the sublime had to be made out of the nonsublime; this is sublimation. It is a raising of the lower to the higher. Characteristically, those who speak about sublimation since Freud are merely lowering the higher, reducing the sublime things to their elements and losing a hold on the separate dignity of the sublime. We no longer know what is higher about the higher.

These last two books of *Emile* then undertake in a detailed way the highly problematic task of showing how the higher might be derived from the lower without being reduced to it, while at the same time giving us some sense of what Rousseau means by the sublime or noble. It has not in the past been sufficiently emphasized that everything in Books IV–V is related to sex. Yet without making that connection the parts cannot be interpreted nor the whole understood.

Rousseau takes it for granted that sex is naturally only a thing of the body. There is no teleology contained in the sexual act other than generation—no concern for the partner, no affection for the children on the part of the male, no directedness to the family. As a simply natural phenomenon, it is not more significant or interesting than eating. In fact, since natural man is primarily concerned with his survival, sex is of secondary importance inasmuch as it contributes nothing to the survival of the individual. But because it is related to another human being, sex easily mingles with and contributes to nascent *amour-propre*. Being liked and preferred to others becomes important in the sexual act. The conquest, mastery, and possession of another will thus also become central to it, and what was originally bodily becomes almost entirely imaginary. This semifolly leads to the extremes of alienation and exploitation. But precisely because the sexual life of civilized man exists primarily in the imagination, it can be manipulated in a way that the desire for food or sleep cannot be. Sexual desire, mixed with imagination and *amour-propre*, if it remains unsatisfied produces a tremendous psychic energy that can be used for the greatest deeds and thoughts. Imaginary objects can set new goals, and the desire to be well thought of can turn into love of virtue. But everything depends on purifying and elevating this desire and making it inseparable from its new objects. Thus Rousseau, although Burke could accuse him of pedantic lewdness, would be appalled by contemporary sex education, which separates out the bodily from the spiritual in sex, does not understand the problem involved in treating the bloated passions of social man as though they were natural, is oblivious to the difficulty of



## INTRODUCTION

attaching the indeterminate drive to useful and noble objects, and fails to appreciate the salutary effect of prolonged ignorance while the bodily humors ferment. Delayed satisfaction is, according to him, the condition of idealism and love, and early satisfaction causes the whole structure to collapse and flatten.

Rousseau's meaning is admirably expressed by Kant, who, following Rousseau, indicated that there is a distinction between what might be called natural puberty and civil puberty.<sup>13</sup> Natural puberty is reached when a male is capable of reproduction. Civil puberty is attained only when a man is able to love a woman faithfully, rear and provide for children, and participate knowledgeably and loyally in the political order which protects the family. But the advent of civilization has not changed the course of nature; natural puberty occurs around fifteen; civil puberty, if it ever comes to pass, can hardly occur before the middle twenties. This means that there is a profound tension between natural desire and civil duty. In fact, this is one of the best examples of the dividedness caused in man by his history. Natural desire almost always lurks untamed amidst the responsibilities of marriage. What Rousseau attempts to do is to make the two puberties coincide, to turn the desire for sexual intercourse into a desire for marriage and a willing submission to the law without suppressing or blaming that original desire. Such a union of desire and duty Kant called true culture.

Rousseau effects this union by establishing successively two passions in *Emile* which are sublimations of sexual desire and which are, hence, not quite natural but, one might say, according to nature: compassion and love.

### COMPASSION

In this first stage the young man is kept ignorant of the meaning of what he is experiencing. He is full of restless energy and becomes sensitive. He needs other human beings, but he knows not why. In becoming sensitive to the feelings of others and in needing them, his imagination is aroused and he becomes aware that they are like him. He *feels* for the first time that he is a member of a species. (Until now he was simply indifferent to other human beings, although he *knew* he was a human being.) At this moment the birth of *amour-propre* is inevitable. He compares his situation with those of other men. If the comparison is unfavorable to him, he will be dissatisfied with himself and envious of them; he will wish to take their place. If the comparison is unfavorable to them, he will be content with himself and not competitive with others. Thus *amour-propre* is alienating only if a man sees others whom he can consider happier than himself. It follows that, if one wishes to keep a man from developing the mean passions which excite the desire to harm, he must always see men whom he thinks to be unhappier than he is. If, in addition, he thinks such misfortunes could happen to him, he will feel pity for the sufferer.

This is the ground of Rousseau's entirely new teaching about compassion.<sup>14</sup> Judiciously chosen comparisons presented at the right stage

13. "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," p. 61, note.

14. Pp. 221 ff. below.

of life will cause Emile to be satisfied with himself and be concerned with others, making him a gentle and beneficent man on the basis of his natural selfishness. Thus compassion would be good for him and good for others. Rousseau introduces a hardheaded softness to moral and political thought.

He asserts that the good fortune of others puts a chill on our hearts, no matter what we say. It separates us from them; we would like to be in their place. But their suffering warms us and gives us a common sense of humanity. The psychic mechanism of compassion is as follows. (1) Once a man's imaginative sensibility is awakened, he winces at the wounds others receive. In an attenuated form he experiences them too, prior to any reflection; he sympathizes; somehow these wounds are inflicted on him. (2) He has a moment of reflection; he realizes that it is the other fellow, not he, who is really suffering. This is a source of satisfaction. (3) He can show his own strength and superiority by assisting the man in distress. (4) He is pleased that he has the spiritual freedom to experience compassion; he senses his own goodness. Active human compassion (as opposed to the animal compassion described in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*) requires imagination and *amour-propre* in addition to the instinct for self-preservation. Moreover, it cannot withstand the demands of one's own self-preservation. It is a tender plant, but one which will bear sweet fruit if properly cultivated.

Emile's first observations of men are directed to the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the unfortunate. This is flattering to him, and his first sentiments toward others are gentle. He becomes a kind of social worker. And, as this analysis should make clear, the motive and intention of Rousseauan compassion give it little in common with Christian compassion. Rousseau was perfectly aware that compassion such as he taught is not a virtue and that it can lead to abuse and hypocrisy. But he used this selfish passion to replace or temper other, more dangerous passions. This is part of his correction of Hobbes. Rousseau finds a selfish passion which contains fellow feeling and makes it the ground of sociality to replace those passions which set men at odds. He can even claim he goes farther down the path first broken by Hobbes, who argued that the passions, and not reason, are the only effective motives of human action. Hobbes's duties towards others are rational deductions from the passion for self-preservation. Rousseau anchors concern for others in a passion. He makes that concern a pleasure rather than a disagreeable, and hence questionably effective, conclusion.

Rousseau's teaching on compassion fostered a revolution in democratic politics, one with which we live today. Compassion is on the lips of every statesman, and all boast that their primary qualification for office is their compassion. Rousseau singlehandedly invented the category of the disadvantaged. Prior to Rousseau, men believed that their claim on civil society has to be based on an accounting of what they contribute to it. After Rousseau, a claim based not on a positive quality but on a lack became legitimate for the first time. This he introduced as a counterpoise to a society based on Locke's teaching, which has no category for the miserable other than that of the idle and the quarrel-



## INTRODUCTION

some. The recognition of our sameness and our common vulnerability dampens the harsh competitiveness and egotism of egalitarian political orders. Rousseau takes advantage of the tendency to compassion resulting from equality, and uses it, rather than self-interest, as the glue binding men together. Our equality, then, is based less on our fear of death than on our sufferings; suffering produces a shared sentiment with others, which fear of death does not. For Hobbes, frightened men make an artificial man to protect them; for Rousseau, suffering men seek other men who feel for them.

Of course Emile will not always be able to confine his vision to poor men without station. There are rich and titled men who seem to be much better off than he is. If he were brought to their castles and had a chance to see their privileges and their entertainments, he would likely be dazzled, and the worm of envy would begin to gnaw away at his heart. Jean-Jacques finds a solution to this difficulty by making Emile read history and bringing back what had been banished in Book II.<sup>15</sup> This is the beginning of Emile's education in the arts, as opposed to the sciences. The former can only be studied when his sentiments are sufficiently developed for him to understand the inner movements of the heart and when he experiences a real need to know. Otherwise, learning is idle, undigested, excess baggage at best. Emile's curiosity to find out about all of Plutarch's heroes and set his own life over against their lives fuels his study. Rousseau expects that this study will reveal the vanity of the heroes' aspirations and cause revulsion at their tragic failures. Emile's solid, natural pleasures, his cheaply purchased Stoicism and self-sufficiency, his lack of the passion to rule, will cause him to despise their love of glory and pity their tragic ends. The second level of the education in compassion produces contempt for the great of this world, not a slave's contempt founded in envy, indignation, and resentment, but the contempt stemming from a conviction of superiority which admits of honest fellow feeling and is the precondition of compassion. This disposition provides a standpoint from which to judge the social and political distinctions among men, just as Robinson Crusoe's island provided one for judging the distinctions based on the division of labor. The joining of these two standards enables Emile to judge the life of tyrants. Socrates enabled Glaucon and Adeimantus to judge it by comparing it to the life of philosophers; Emile can use his own life as the basis for judgment, for his own soul contains no germ of the tyrannical temptation. The old way of using heroes in education was to make the pupil dissatisfied with himself and rivalrous with the model. Rousseau uses them to make his pupil satisfied with himself and compassionate toward the heroes. The old way alienated the child and made him prey to authorities whose titles he could not judge. Self-satisfaction of egalitarian man is what Rousseau promotes. But he is careful to insure that this satisfaction is only with a good or natural self.

Reading is again the means of accomplishing the third and final part of the education in compassion.<sup>16</sup> This time the texts are fables

15. Pp. 236-244; cf. 110-112 below.

16. Pp. 244-249; cf. 112-116 below; and Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, part 3, chap. 1.

which contain a moral teaching. They, too, had been banished in Book II, because a child would always identify himself with, e.g., the fox who cheats the crow rather than with the crow who loses the cheese, for a child understands nothing about vanity and a great deal about cheese. At this later stage Rousseau has arranged for Emile to have been deceived by confidence men who play upon his vanity, so that when he reads the fable he will immediately identify with the crow and attain self-consciousness. Satire becomes the mirror in which he sees himself. All this is intended to remind him that he, too, is human and could easily fall victim to the errors made by others. It is as though Rousseau had used Aristotle's discourse on the passions as a text and followed Aristotle's warning that those who do not imagine that the misfortunes befalling others can befall them are insolent rather than compassionate.<sup>17</sup> The first stage of Emile's introduction to the human condition shows him that most men are sufferers; the second, that the great, too, are sufferers and hence equal to the small; and the third, that he is potentially a sufferer, saved only by his education. Equality, which was a rational deduction in Hobbes, thus becomes self-evident to the sentiments. Emile's first principle of action was pleasure and pain; his second, after the birth of reason and his learning the sciences, was utility; now compassion is added to the other two, and concern for others becomes part of his sense of his own interest. Rousseau studies the passions and finds a way of balancing them one against the other rather than trying to develop the virtues which govern them. He does for the soul what Montesquieu did for the government: invent the separation and balance of powers.

But for all its important consequences in its own right, compassion within the context of Emile's education is only a step on the way to his fulfillment as husband and father. Its primary function is to make Emile social while remaining whole.

#### LOVE

Finally Rousseau must tell Emile the meaning of his longings. He reveals sex to the young Emile as the Savoyard Vicar revealed God to the young Jean-Jacques.<sup>18</sup> Although it is impossible to discuss the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar here, it is essential to the understanding of Rousseau's intention to underline the profound differences between the two revelations. The Vicar's teaching is presented to the corrupt young Rousseau and never to Emile. Moreover, the Vicar teaches the dualism of body and soul, which is alien and contradictory to the unity which Emile incarnates. In keeping with this, the Vicar is otherworldly and guilt-ridden about his sexual desires, which he deprecates, whereas Emile is very much of this world and exalts his sexual desires, which are blessed by God and lead to blessing God. Emile's rewards are on earth, the Vicar's in Heaven. The Vicar is the best of the traditional, and he is only an oasis in the desert which Rousseau crossed before reaching his new Sinai.

17. Aristotle *Rhetoric* II 8 and 2.

18. Pp. 260-313, 316-334 below.



## INTRODUCTION

Thus at the dawn of a new day, Emile learns that the peak of sexual longing is the love of God mediated by the love of a woman.<sup>19</sup> Sublimation finally operates a transition from the physical to the metaphysical. But before speaking to Emile, Rousseau explains to his readers how difficult it is to be a good rhetorician in modern times. Speech has lost its power because it cannot refer to a world with deep human significance. In Greek and Biblical antiquity the world was full of meaning put there by the great and terrible deeds of gods and heroes. Men were awe-struck by the ceremonies performed to solemnize public and private occasions. The whole earth spoke out to make oaths sacred. But now the world has been deprived of its meaning by Enlightenment. The land is no longer peopled by spirits, and nothing supports human aspiration anymore. Thus men can only affect one another by the use of force or the profit motive. The language of human relations has lost its foundations. This is, as we would say, a demythologized world. And these remarks show what Rousseau is about. He wants to use imagination to read meaning back into nature. The old meanings were also the results of imaginings the reality of which men believed. They were monuments of fear and anger given cosmic significance. But they did produce a human world, however cruel and unreasonable. Rousseau suggests a new poetic imagination motivated by love rather than the harsher passions, and here one sees with clarity Rousseau's link with romanticism.

With this preface, he proceeds to inform Emile what the greatest pleasure in life is. He explains to him that what he desires is sexual intercourse with a woman, but he makes him believe that his object contains ideas of virtue and beauty without which she would not be attractive, nay, without which she would be repulsive. His bodily satisfaction depends upon his beloved's spiritual qualities; therefore Emile longs for the beautiful. Jean-Jacques by his descriptive power incorporates an ideal into Emile's bodily lust. This is how sex becomes love, and the two must be made to appear inseparable. This is the reason for the delay in sexual awareness. Emile must learn much before he can comprehend such notions, and his sexual energy must be raised to a high pitch. Early indulgence would separate the intensity of lust from the objects of admiration. Rousseau admits that love depends upon illusions, but the deeds which those illusions produce are real. This is the source of nobility of mind and deed, and apart from fanaticism, nothing else can produce such dedication.

Rousseau develops all this with precision and in the greatest detail. Only Plato has meditated on love with comparable profundity.<sup>20</sup> And it is Plato who inspired Rousseau's attempt to create love. The modern philosophers with whom Rousseau began have notably unerotic teachings. Their calculating, fear-motivated men are individuals, not directed towards others, towards couplings and the self-forgetting implied in them. Such men have flat souls. They see nature as it is; and, since they are unerotic, they are unpoetic. Rousseau, a philosopher-poet like Plato, tried to recapture the poetry in the world. He knew that Plato's *Symposium* taught that *eros* is the longing for eternity, ultimately the

19. P. 426 below.

20. *La Nouvelle Heloise* II, xi, second note.

longing for oneness with the unchanging, intelligible *ideas*. Now, Rousseau held that nature is the nature of modern science—matter in motion—that there are no *ideas*, there is no *eros*, only sex. But such a soul, which has no beautiful objects to contemplate and contains no divine madness, Rousseau regarded as ignoble. He set about reconstructing Plato's soul, turning sex into *eros*, by the creation of ideals to take the place of the *ideas*. The philosopher is even more poetic for Rousseau than for Plato, for the very objects of contemplation and longing are the products of poetry rather than nature. The world of concern to man is made by the poet who has understood nature and its limits. So, imagination, once banished, returns to ascend the royal throne.

From imagination thus purified and exalted comes the possibility of Emile's first real relationship with another human being, i.e., a freely chosen enduring union between equals based upon reciprocal affection and respect, each treating the other as an end in himself. This completes Emile's movement from nature to society, a movement unbroken by alien motives such as fear, vanity, or coercion. He has neither been denatured after the fashion of Sparta nor has moral obligation been reduced to a mere product of his selfishness as is the way of the *bourgeois*. He has an overwhelming need for another, but that other must be the embodiment of the ideal of beauty, and his interest in her partakes of the disinterestedness of the love of the beautiful. Moreover it is not quite precise to say that he loves an "other," for he will not be making himself hostage to an alien will and thus engaging in a struggle for mastery. This woman will, to use Platonic language, participate in the *idea* he has of her. He will recognize in her his own highest aspirations. She will complete him without alienating him. If Emile and Sophie can be constituted as a unit and individualism thereby surmounted, then Rousseau will have shown how the building blocks of a society are formed. Individuals cannot be the basis of a real community but families can be.

Now that Emile's dominant motive is longing for an object which exists only in his imagination, the rest of his education becomes a love story within a story. This little prototype of the romantic novel has three stages: the quest for his beloved; his discovery of her and their courtship; their separation, his travels, and their marriage.

*The quest.* Rousseau uses this time of intense passion to lead Emile into society and instruct him about its ways without fear that he will be corrupted by it.<sup>21</sup> Emile knows what he wants, and Rousseau knows that he will not find it in Paris. Emile's very passion provides him the standard by which he can judge men and women and their relations while being protected from the ordinary charms and temptations. A man in love sees things differently from those who are not so possessed, and he sees their concerns as petty and dull; he is, as well, proof against the attractions of all women other than his beloved. Emile is already in love, but he does not know with whom. He is, therefore, unlike most

21. Pp. 327-355 below.



## INTRODUCTION

lovers, an attentive observer, seeking to recognize the one for whom he is looking. In this way Rousseau provides him with the third of four standards for the evaluation of men in society which taken together serve as a substitute for the philosopher's vantage point outside the cave. The first was Crusoe's island, which enabled Emile to understand men's purely material relations in the division of labor and exchange and to maintain his independence while profiting from the progress of civilization in the sciences and productive industries. The second was compassion, which made him aware of mankind in its natural unity and its conventional division into classes. This awareness involved him with his fellows but maintained him in his self-sufficiency. Rousseau separates out into layers what the philosopher grasps together as a whole, and Emile is given an experience, founded in sentiment and imagination, of each of these layers or aspects of man and society. These experiences take the place of the savage's instinct that the civilized man has lost and of the philosopher's rational insight that the ordinary man cannot attain. Thus Emile has principles to guide him in life. They are founded on his deep and strong feelings, and they are his own, not dependent on any authority other than himself.

The third standard or standpoint, that of the lover, puts him in intimate contact with men and their passions. And he is, for the first time, needy. But it does make him both see and despise the vanities of society and the involvements with others that are not directly related to love. Moreover, in the society of the rich and noble in a great aristocracy Emile associates for the first time with men and women of high refinement and subtlety of manners. And here he has his first experience of the fine arts which are developed to please such people and constitute their principle entertainment. These arts are always the companions of idleness and luxury and most often are products of vice and instruments of deception as manners are the substitute for virtue. But from them Emile gains an exquisite sensibility and a delicacy of taste in the passions which matches the soundness of his reasoning about things. He has learned the sciences to satisfy his bodily needs; he learns the arts to enrich the transports of love. Poetry for him is not a pastime but the very element in which his sublime longings move. The depth of his feeling is given voice by these great products of civilization and not corrupted by it. He is now a cultivated man, and the motives of his learning have kept him healthy and whole. Rousseau has answered his own objections to the arts and sciences propounded in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*.

*Discovery and courtship.* Emile's discovery of his Sophie in the country is the occasion for Rousseau's discourse on the differences between the sexes and their proper relations.<sup>22</sup> No segment of *Emile* is more "relevant" than is this one nor is any likely to arouse more indignation, for Rousseau is a "sexist." The particular force of Rousseau's argument for us comes from the fact that he begins from thoroughly modern premises—not deriving from Biblical or Greek thought—and arrives

22. Pp. 357-341 below.

at conclusions diametrically opposed to those of feminism. Furthermore, his analysis is unrivaled in its breadth and precision. So persuasive was he to Tocqueville that the latter asserted that the principle cause of America's "singular prosperity and growing strength" was its women, whom he describes as though they had been educated by Rousseau.<sup>23</sup> This analysis will not seem nearly so persuasive today because of the political force of a movement which Rousseau predicted as an almost inevitable result of the bourgeoisification of the world, a tide which he was trying to stem. He saw that rationalism and egalitarianism would tend to destroy the sexual differences just as they were leveling class and national distinctions. Man and woman, husband and wife, and parent and child would become roles, not natural qualities; and as in all play-acting, roles can be changed. The only unaltered fragment of nature remaining, and thus dominating, would be the selfish Hobbesian individual, striving for self-preservation, comfort, and power after power. Marriage and the family would decay and the sexes be assimilated. Children would be burdens and not fulfillments.

It is impossible in this place to comment fully on Rousseau's intentions and arguments in this crucial passage. I must limit myself to a few general remarks. In the first place Rousseau insisted that the family is the only basis for a healthy society, given the impossibility and undesirability in modernity of Spartan dedication to the community. Without caring for others, without the willingness to sacrifice one's private interest to them, society is but a collection of individuals, each of whom will disobey the law as soon as it goes counter to his interest. The family tempers the selfish individualism which has been released by the new regimes founded on modern natural right teachings. And Rousseau further insists that there will be no family if women are not primarily wives and mothers. Second, he argues that there can be no natural, i.e., whole, social man if women are essentially the same as men. Two similar beings, as it were atoms, who united out of mutual need would exploit one another, each using his partner as a means to his own ends, putting himself ahead of him or her. There would be a clash of wills and a struggle for mastery, unless they simply copulated like beasts and separated immediately after (leaving the woman, of course, with the care of the unintended progeny). Human beings would be divided between their attachment to themselves and their duty to others. The project undertaken by Rousseau was to overcome or avoid this tension.

Thus the relations between man and woman is the crucial point, the place where the demands of Emile's wholeness and those of civil society meet. If Rousseau can overcome the difficulties in that relation, difficulties which were always present in the past but which have become critically explicit in modern theory and practice, he will have resolved the tension between inclination and duty, nature and society. What he proposes is that the two sexes are different and complementary, each imperfect and requiring the other in order to be a whole being, or rather, together forming a single whole being. Rousseau does not

23. *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, part 3, chap. 12.



## INTRODUCTION

seriously treat a state as an organism, but he does so treat a couple. He tries to show that male and female bodies and souls fit together like pieces in a puzzle, and he does so in such a way as to make his conclusions compatible with natural science, on the one hand, and freedom and equality on the other. In particular, Rousseau argues that woman rules man by submitting to his will and knowing how to make him will what she needs to submit to. In this way Emile's freedom of will is preserved without Sophie's will being denied. Further, Rousseau argues, a woman naturally cares for her children; thus a man, loving her exclusively, will also care for the children. So it is that the family is constituted. None of this is found in the state of nature, but it is in accord with natural potentialities and reconciles the results of civilization with them. Whatever the success of Rousseau's attempt in this matter, the comprehensiveness and power of his reasoning as well as the subtlety of his psychological observation makes this one of the very few fundamental texts for the understanding of man and woman, and a touchstone for serious discussion of the matter.

The courtship of Emile and Sophie is merely their discovery of the many facets of the essential man and the essential woman and how well suited they are to one another. They reveal to one another each of the aspects of their respective natures and educations. If these had been the same, they would not really need each other or know of love, which is the recognition of an absence in oneself. Each would be a separate machine whose only function is to preserve itself, making use of everything around it to that end. The primary aim of the education of civilized man and woman is to prepare them for one another. Such education is Rousseau's unique educational innovation and where he takes most specific exception to Locke and Plato.<sup>24</sup>

*Travel.* Emile is ready to marry and enjoy the long-awaited consummation of his desires.<sup>25</sup> But Jean-Jacques orders him to leave Sophie, thus reenacting both Agamemnon's taking Briseis from Achilles and God's forbidding Adam from eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. This is the only example of a commandment in *Emile*, and the only time Emile's inclinations are thwarted by another will. But Emile, although sorely tried, submits and becomes neither the wrathful Achilles nor the disobedient Adam. There is no Fall. For the first time Emile becomes subject to a law and has an inner experience of the tension between inclination and duty. Jean-Jacques's authority goes back to a promise he extracted from Emile at the time of the revelation of sex. This is the first and only promise Emile makes to Jean-Jacques. If his tutor will give him guidance in matters of love, he will agree to accept his advice. He joins in what might be called a sexual contract which is the original of all other contracts he will make in his life; or, to put it more accurately, this first contract contains all the others. The obligation to Sophie which Emile learns to fulfill leads to the obligations to the family and these in turn to those to civil society.

Thus the scene where Jean-Jacques finally asks Emile to keep his promise encapsulates the whole problem of morality as he envisions it:

24. Pp. 357, 362-363, 415-416 below.

25. Pp. 441-450 below.

why keep a promise? A man makes a promise because he expects some good to result to him from doing so. But when he finds that it is more advantageous to break his promise, why should he keep it? What is good in itself about keeping faith? If there is no adequate basis for obligation, there is no basis for human society. Throughout *Emile* Rousseau has shown that all previous thinkers had added some kind of reward or punishment—wealth, honor, heaven or prison, disgrace, hell—to faith, thereby reducing it to the calculation of the other palpable goods which have been allied with it. Duty seems always to stem from the will of another, as epitomized in God's prohibition or Agamemnon's command, and society has therefore always demanded an abandonment of natural freedom and an unnatural bending to the needs of community. Spartan denaturing, Christian piety, and *bourgeois* calculation are, according to Rousseau, the three powerful alternative modes of making this accommodation. The first is the only one which does not divide and hence corrupt; but the undesirability of the Spartan example is fully expressed in the word "denaturing." This is why Emile has been subjected to no law but only to necessity and has always been left free to follow his inclinations. His education up to this point has shown just how far one can go in making a man sociable without imposing a law on him. But when it comes to his relation to women, something other than inclination must be involved. Emile must contract with Sophie, and sexual desire will not suffice as a guarantee of his future fidelity. It is instructive to note that the dramatic conflict between Jean-Jacques and Emile concerns the identical problem as do the conflicts between God and Adam and Agamemnon and Achilles. And it would appear that Rousseau resolves the conflict just as his ancient predecessors did, by an act of authority, the imposition of an alien will on his pupil's desires. It seems that Rousseau remains within the tradition which holds that morality is, to use Kantian language, heteronomous. Emile's reluctance to obey Jean-Jacques's command would seem to confirm this.

But the difference in Emile's conflict with Jean-Jacques becomes apparent when we see that Emile does not rebel but acquiesces, and his obedience is not the result of fear. First of all, Jean-Jacques's authority to command is based neither on force, tradition, or age, nor on purported superior wisdom or divine right. Following modern political philosophy, it is based solely on consent. Jean-Jacques commands only because he was once begged by Emile to command. The legitimacy of the contract is supported by the fact that Emile believes that Jean-Jacques is benevolent and interested only in his happiness, in his happiness as he himself conceives of it, not as Jean-Jacques or society might wish it. The promise to obey was intimately connected with the revelation of the greatest imaginable happiness and was intended to secure the only good he did not yet possess—love—and to avoid the dangers surrounding it. Sophie is to be returned to him, and there will be no curse of original sin on sexual desire. Everything speaks in favor of Jean-Jacques's authority.

But still it is authority. If Emile had by himself seen the good in what was commanded him, it would not have had to be commanded.



## INTRODUCTION

The decisive step for Rousseau is to transform the external authority—however intimate—into an internal one. Jean-Jacques reminds Emile of his ideal Sophie and tries to show him that his love of the real Sophie could well undermine it, and with it, love itself. For example, if Sophie were not faithful, his attachment would remain and drag him down. Only if he were able to give up Sophie for what Sophie ought to be could he endure the vagaries of fortune and the human will. The separation from Sophie is the precondition of accepting life and of the foundation of the family. Emile's desire for immediate possession of Sophie rebels against his own will. For the first time he is forced to make a distinction between inclination and will. The problem of morality is no longer the conflict between inclination and duty but between inclination and ideal, which is a kind of equivalent of the conflict between particular and general will. The dedication to the ideal, completing the whole education, has been a generalizing of Emile's soul and his principles of action. The first command occurs at the moment when he is ready to see that it is not Jean-Jacques who is commanding but Emile—that he is obeying a law he has in fact set for himself. Jean-Jacques appears on the scene as an authority just this once in the course of his twenty-five years with Emile—only in order to annihilate the influence of authority on him. In this way Emile can be both free and moral. *Emile* is the outline of a possible bridge between the particular will and the general will.

The separation from Sophie is used for learning politics.<sup>26</sup> Now he has a good motive for such learning. When he was unattached, he was cosmopolitan, staying or leaving as he pleased, able to fend for himself anywhere, always an inhabitant of Crusoe's island and hence indifferent to the laws of men. But now, with a wife and children, he must settle down and become subject to a political regime. He must know which are most just and most secure, and he must adjust his hopes to the possible. It is well that he has learned what subjection to a law is, for politics means laws. But these political laws rarely if ever conform to the standard of justice, and Emile must reflect on how he is to come to terms with unjust regimes and their commands. He knows what perfect duties are, and they will help to guide him in the less than perfect duties imposed on him by civil society. His passion for his future wife and concern for their unborn children, combined with his mature learning, make an abstract presentation of the principles of right accessible to him. He is, in effect, taught the *Social Contract*. (Rousseau thus indicates the kind of reader for whom he intended it.) This provides Emile with his fourth standard, the one which permits him to evaluate the most comprehensive human order, civil society. And his travels enable him, given this focus, to recognize the various alternative "caves" and their advantages and disadvantages.

Finally he is complete and can claim his bride and his happiness. Rousseau has made him intellectually and morally self-sufficient.<sup>27</sup>

26. Pp. 450-471 below.

27. Pp. 471-480 below.

## Conclusion

*Emile* might seem to some ridiculous because it proposes a system of education which is manifestly impossible for most men and virtually impossible for any man. But this is to misunderstand the book. It is not an educational manual, any more than Plato's *Republic* is advice to rulers. Each adopts a convention—the founding of a city or the rearing of a boy—in order to survey the entire human condition. They are books for philosophers<sup>28</sup> and are meant to influence practice only in the sense that those who read them well cannot help but change their general perspectives.

Rousseau intends to show that only his understanding of nature and history can adequately describe what man really is and to caution his contemporaries against simplifying and impoverishing the human phenomena. The very unity of man he appears to believe he has demonstrated reveals the problematic character of any solution to man's dividedness. *Emile* stands somewhere between the citizen of the *Social Contract* and the solitary of the *Reveries*, lacking something of each. And this book was the inspiration for both Kant's idealism and Schiller's romanticism, each of which is somehow an elaboration of one aspect of Rousseau's complex teaching. Whatever else Rousseau may have accomplished, he presented the alternatives available to man most comprehensively and profoundly and articulated them in the form which has dominated discussion since his time. We must study him to know ourselves and to discover possibilities his great rhetoric may have overwhelmed.

28. "... it is a new system of education the plan of which I present for the study of the wise and not a method for fathers and mothers. . . ." (*Letters Written from the Mountain V* [*Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 783]). This does not mean that Rousseau's teaching is ultimately one of political moderation as is Plato's.



## Note

*Emile* was published in 1762, almost simultaneously with the *Social Contract* and two years after the *Nouvelle Heloise*. Together these three works constitute an exploration of the consequences for modern man of the tensions between nature and civilization, freedom and society, and hence happiness and progress which Rousseau propounded in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750) and the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1754). They each experiment with resolutions of the fundamental human problem, the *Social Contract* dealing with civil society and the citizen, the *Nouvelle Heloise* with love, marriage, and the family, and *Emile* with the education of a naturally whole man who is to live in society. They provide Rousseau's positive statement about the highest possibilities of society and the way to live a good life within it. The major works to which he devoted the rest of his life (*Confessions*, *Dialogues*, *Dreams of a Solitary Walker*) were dedicated to meditation on and presentation to mankind of the profoundest kind of soul, his own, the soul capable of revealing the human situation as he did in his earlier writings.

